

PLEASE KEEP—THIS GUIDE WILL NOT BE ISSUED IN 1946



ALLOTMENT &

Garden Guide

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Unlike Keats's "too happy tree," we gardeners are apt, in the words of another poet, to indulge in the pastime of "I remember." And no doubt on more than one drear December night we shall sit by the fire thinking of our successes and failures of the past season in the vegetable and fruit gardens. We shall no doubt do a bit of moralising, too—possibly make good resolutions about being more timely in our operations next year. And as it's the month traditionally associated with goodwill to all men, we may be thinking about Christmas presents, not only those we may perchance expect but those we will like to give. So as there's very little we may be able to do outdoors this time of year, save possibly getting on with digging any spare ground that's not frostbound, let us do a bit of fireside gardening, with a bit of looking back and perhaps a glance into the future.

Looking back

It has been said that of all dead things only the past smells sweet. How does the past "smell" to you as you look back on your gardening year? If you were successful, no

doubt the past year was "sweet." (But were there no crops that failed you?). If, however, your season was very mixed, you will no doubt be thinking of the weather or the pests or both.

The weather is always with us to grouse about, and 1945 was on the whole a poor year. In the first place we got away to a bad start. The Januarys of 1940 and 1945 were among the coldest of the last half century, and those of us who put off doing things before Christmas were less inclined to do anything for a long time afterwards. The beginning of the year's offensive was far too long delayed on many allotments, with the result that the "diggers" were for ever trying to catch up on the jobs to be done and seldom succeeded,



and the soil lacked the weathering influence that benefits land dug during winter.

Too much rain, not enough sun—that was 1945. Tomatoes loomed large in the minds of most of our gardeners. They were late in most places owing to the lack of ripening sun, and numerous were the enquiries for hints on speeding up ripening. Some people had trouble with their runners: the flowers would not set. In built-up areas there were no bees to do the job of pollination and some allotment holders were unable to give the flowers the fine misty spraying that could have helped. Or it may have been that watering, where possible, was irregular and the land dried out too quickly, which was a trouble on the Ministry's own demonstration allotments in Hyde Park. On some plots marrows suddenly died off and there was little that could be done about that.



No doubt owing to the American "invasion" of this country many gardeners became much interested in sweet corn, and there were complaints about delayed ripening. On the Ministry's own plots, however, which are by no means ideal, the variety

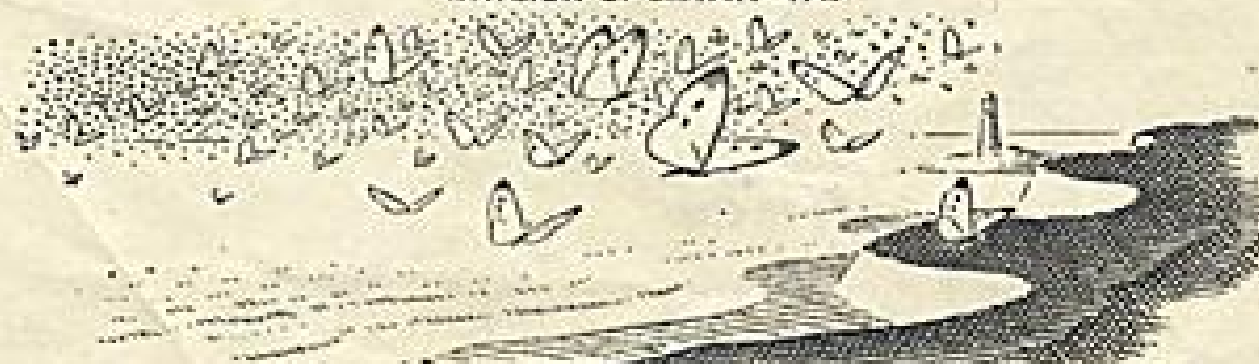


"John Innes Hybrid," which is early maturing, did well and aroused much interest. The various herbs grown there also came in for attention and later on there is a note on this subject.

But perhaps the subject that was most often raised by visitors to the Ministry's plots was pests and diseases. Greenfly and blackfly, of course, are nearly always with us and occasioned many enquiries, but the "Cabbage White" butterfly came in for the most vituperation. The Ministry's woman demonstrator reports that one Sunday morning in a Sustex cottage she picked about fifty caterpillars off the walls upstairs and downstairs, and that a cabbage field nearby was "skeletonised" in groups. We read that ninety-nine years ago passengers on a cross-Channel boat found the sun obscured for hundreds of yards by a cloud of this pest flying from France to England. This year their descendants must have come in even greater numbers, and only those gardeners who took prompt action by spraying and hand-picking managed to save their green crops, especially the Brussels, from being turned into skeletons.



INVASION OF BRITAIN—1945



Does vegetable growing pay?

During the last year or so the question has often been raised "Does an allotment pay?" Following Dr. Joad's example, it all depends on what you mean by pay. And whom does it pay?

The Ministry of Agriculture has from time to time published the financial returns of demonstration allotments in different parts of the country, which showed that crops to the value of anything from £20 to £30, at retail prices, had been grown on 10 rods. Records of about a hundred 10-rod plots kept in 1940-41 showed an average of nearly 20 lb. edible weight of vegetables weekly in winter, the figures for the other seasons being, spring, 11 lb.; summer, 12 lb.; autumn, 15 lb.

Of course, there is far more to it than mere financial returns, though the thrifty housewife would be the first to acknowledge what a help it is, in these days of high prices, to have her "good man" bring her home vegetables in variety that cost a good deal to buy in the shops. She knows, too, how important a part vegetables play in maintaining family health.

The "good man" himself may not, perhaps, have thought about the allotment first from the economic angle. His attitude depends on whether he had a plot before the war, or took it on after the war started. No doubt the pre-war allotment holder felt the call of the land and the allotment was his pastime. The war-time cultivator would probably say that he wanted to make sure of vegetables for his family; in some cases he may have feared a food shortage or patriotically desired to help the national food situation. Whatever the motive that prompted the man to take on an allotment, he has benefited himself: he is generally better in health because of the exercise, better in spirit because cultivating his plot took his mind off the war or the burdens of office or workshop; he has benefited his family by providing fresh vegetables that kept them fit—and, incidentally helped his wife in trying to make ends meet and avoid queues;



he and his fellow "Victory Diggers" benefited their country by contributing in every year of the war a substantial and indispensable quantity of food to the national larder, without which

the nation might well have had to go short, not only of vegetables but of other food which our farmers have been enabled to grow through the "Victory Diggers'" efforts. Does an allotment pay? Emphatically it does, provided it is well managed and efficiently cultivated. And the same goes for the private vegetable garden, too.

11 lbs.
WEEKLY

SPRING

12 lbs.
WEEKLY

SUMMER

15 lbs.
WEEKLY

AUTUMN

20 lbs.
WEEKLY

WINTER

About those **TOOLS**

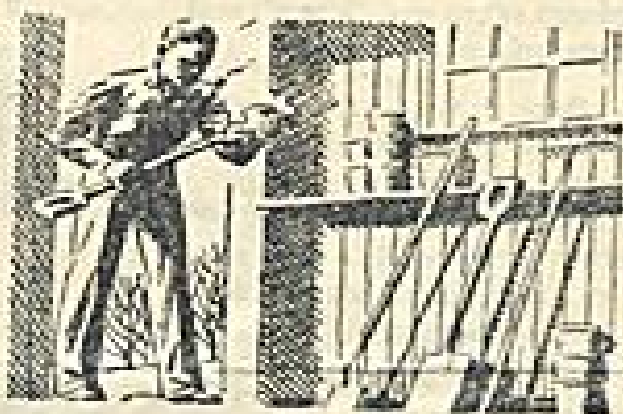


Now is the time of year when you ought to take stock of your tools and buy any replacements, so that you will be ready for next season. There are a number of little things that matter when you are choosing new tools and the following hints may be helpful, especially in these days when quality seems to have suffered. When getting a spade, make sure that it's comfortable to handle. And see that the wide ends of the grain are at the side of the handle, otherwise it might split later on and tear your hands, or even break with a heavy strain. The rivet on the shaft should be well sunk and smoothed off, or again your hands may suffer.

A good fork should be properly forged and should ring clearly when you knock the prongs on the floor. Gardeners generally prefer a flattish trowel, for the very round sort makes the work much harder. Take care, too, in buying rakes and hoes. A very thin handle is not comfortable to grip, so try it in the shop before you take it away. The hoe should be properly welded, as it will have some tough work to do when the ground is very hard. The teeth of an iron rake should be riveted firmly or they will soon fall out.

Better still, get one that is cast in one piece.

If you have no need to buy, it will repay you to take care of what you have. See that all your tools are stored in a safe place. Spades, hoes, trowels, rakes and forks should be thoroughly cleaned, dried and well oiled before being put away for their short rest. Nets should also be well dried and neatly rolled up, the garden line cleaned of soil and stored safely in a dry place, barrows put under cover and, if necessary, given a coat of paint—if you can get it. Well-kept garden tools make the work so much easier, for a sharp, well-kept spade demands far less energy than one that has not had its regular cleaning and oiling.



Christmas and the gardener

Gardeners are a clannish, generous crowd as a rule, and the coming of the first peace-time Christmas may afford them an opportunity to give presents that may come in useful next gardening season—possibly for many seasons to come, according to the kind of gift. Most of us gardeners are seldom blessed with too many tools, for instance. And there is a

wide range from a trowel costing a few shillings to a wheelbarrow for a few pounds.

Then a good gardening book is always a good "buy." To-day, more than ever before, gardeners are seeking knowledge and generally the bookseller has a section of his shelves devoted to gardening books from a few shillings upwards. Or if you



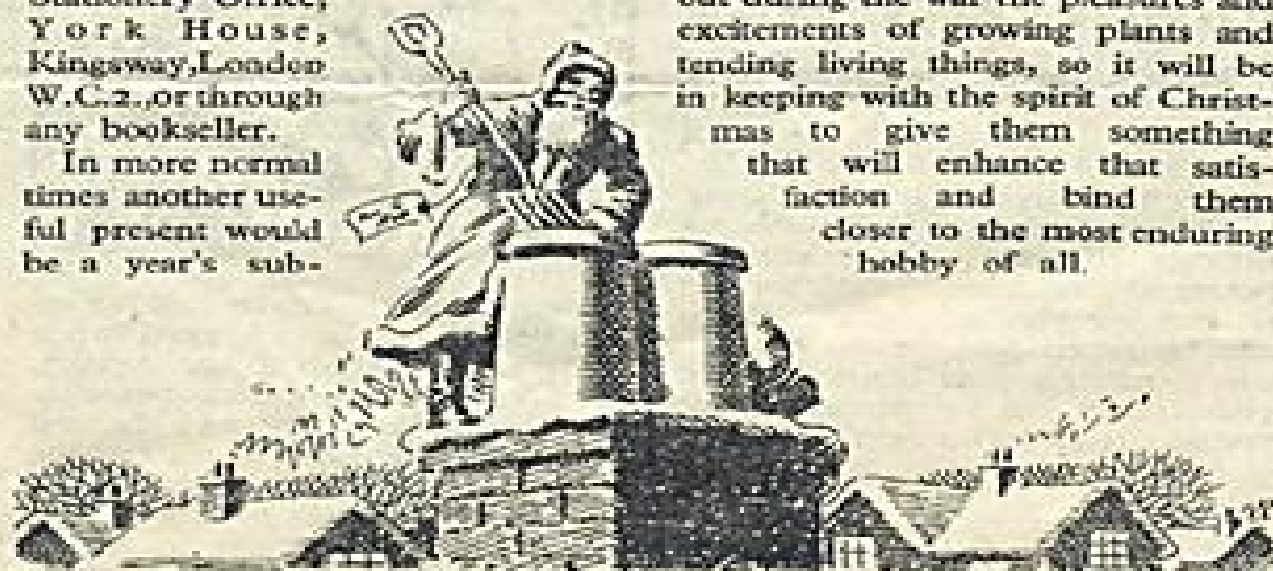
want to give something cheaper, your friend would value the Royal Horticultural Society's excellent book "The Vegetable Garden Displayed," which is lavishly illustrated with instructional photographs and can be obtained from the Society at Vincent Square, London, S.W.1., price 2/- post free. Or—cheaper still and, in effect, a practical Christmas "card"—is any one of the Ministry's own bulletins:—"Food from the Garden," 3d. (4d.), "Fruit from the Garden," 3d. (4d.), "Pests and Diseases in the Vegetable Garden," 4d. (5d.). Incidentally, a revised and up-to-date edition of the last-named has recently been published. If there's a lady in the case, she may like "Domestic Preservation of Fruit and Vegetables," 1s. 6d. (1s. 8d.) or the cheaper bulletin "Preserves from the Garden," 4d. (5d.). The figures in brackets are inclusive of postage. All these bulletins can be had from H.M. Stationery Office, York House, Kingsway, London W.C.2., or through any bookseller.

In more normal times another useful present would be a year's sub-

scription to one of the gardening periodicals; but in these days of continuing paper shortage these journals cannot print enough copies to meet the heavy demands made on them.

If you are a member of an allotment or horticultural society, why not make your friend a member by paying his or her first subscription? For knowledge gained from these personal contacts is sometimes more helpful than the written word.

Gifts of plants, seeds or bulbs are always appreciated, so what about a collection of vegetable seeds, a few fruit trees or bushes, or perhaps some attractive flowering plants not needing too much attention in these days of scanty leisure. Or a bag of shallot sets, a pinch of a well-guarded strain of onion seed, a few divisions from a clump of chives or other useful perennials, all make timely and acceptable Christmas offerings. Hundreds of thousands have found out during the war the pleasures and excitements of growing plants and tending living things, so it will be in keeping with the spirit of Christmas to give them something that will enhance that satisfaction and bind them closer to the most enduring hobby of all.

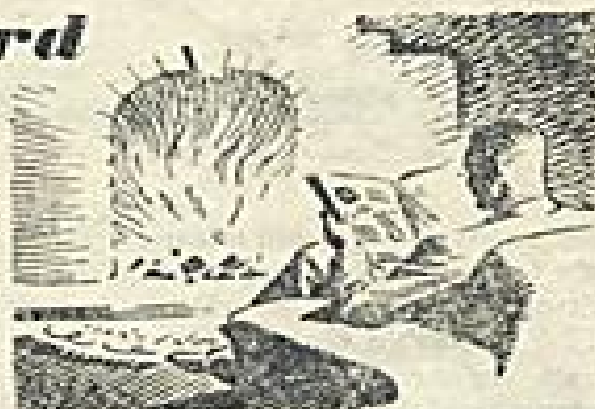


Looking forward

When we are doing our fireside gardening round about Christmas we shall like to have our seedsman's catalogue to study. So if you have not already got it, send for it on receipt of this Guide. And remember that he has still got his labour difficulties and that he would appreciate it if you sent in your order early, not delay ordering until the last moment just before sowing time, when there is always a hectic rush at seedsman's premises. Order your seed potatoes early, too, for transport is far from being normal.

The seed position looks like being pretty favourable, except that broad beans are likely to be short. But don't feel aggrieved if you still can't get all your favourite varieties. You'll know only too well that the end of the war has not meant the solution of all our problems.

As to artificial fertilizers—or "mineral" fertilizers, which is the



better term—the situation can be summed up in two words—"no change." There is likely to be a sufficiency of "National Growmore," the balanced fertilizer sponsored by the Government, which has been tried by many gardeners and found quite satisfactory.

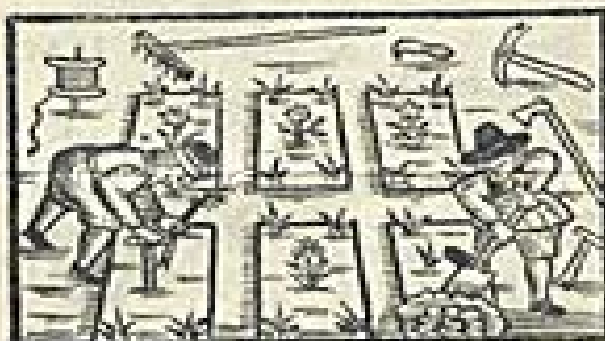
Make a new plan for the cropping of your allotment or garden, being guided by your past experience of what to grow and the quantity of each kind.



What about some HERBS?

When planning your garden or allotment for next year, bear herbs in mind. If you already have one or two kinds, try some of the less common, to give variety of flavour to your vegetables. Herbs are not difficult to grow, for many are perennial; once established, they go on growing year after year. Plants can be raised from seeds; but as this is rather a slow business, see if your friends can let you have some cuttings or pieces for next spring and early summer.

In the meantime get the soil ready by digging deeply and working in plenty of well-rotted manure or compost. Once the plants are



growing, only surface cultivation will be possible, so it is worth while making a good job of the digging. It will then only be necessary to keep weeds in check and the soil aerated by hoeing during the growing season. It is better to group herbs together in one bed. Mint prefers partial shade and not too dry a soil; but most of the others like a sunny, well-drained soil.

There are several forms of mint, but the nicest for mint sauce and other flavouring is spearmint. "Runners," or side branches of an old plant, root very easily and may be planted in March or April. If there is no natural shade, a mulch of rotted leaves will help to keep the roots cool.

Besides the ordinary thyme, the lemon-flavoured kind should be grown. Both prefer a warm soil. Cuttings can be taken during the early summer, or old plants can be lifted and divided into convenient pieces for replanting in Spring. It is a good plan to do this every two or three years, as old plants often get "leggy" and bare of young shoots.

Sage is another herb that can be propagated by cuttings, preferably with a "heel"—a piece of the old stem attached to the slip. In some districts they need the protection of a cold frame for rooting. April and May are the best months for this.

Pot marjoram or sweet marjoram, the best-known forms, can be raised from cuttings, though they are often treated as annuals, seeds being sown each April.

Chervil and savory are two more herbs that are often raised from seeds, though savory can also be propagated in the same way

as thyme. Chervil is used fresh, but savory can be dried like sage.

Chives are among the easiest herbs to grow and the "grass" or stems, either fresh or dried, can be used for flavouring instead of onions. The more it is cut, the better the plant grows. The plants make a delightful edging to the herb bed and new plantings can be made in autumn or spring by lifting and dividing old plants into single bulbs or groups of two or three.

Parsley, too, is suitable as an edging plant. To get successional supplies it is best to sow three times: February or March, April, or early May, and again in July. The last sowing will give fresh parsley until severe frosts cut down the plants.

Fresh sprigs of parsley are generally used, but it is not always known that the shoots can be dried for winter use. To keep the colour as much as possible, the drying must be done quickly, and it is best to put the bunches in a cool oven.

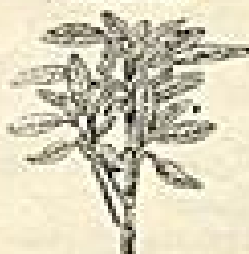
Among the less common herbs are tarragon, wormwood, southern-wood, basil, balm and fennel. Now is the time to look round and see where you can get seeds, cuttings or pieces to make a start next spring.



MINT



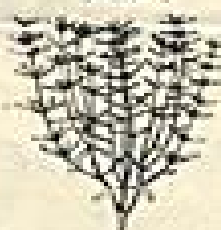
MARJORAM



SAGE



CHERVIL



SAVORY



TARRAGON

First aid for the birds

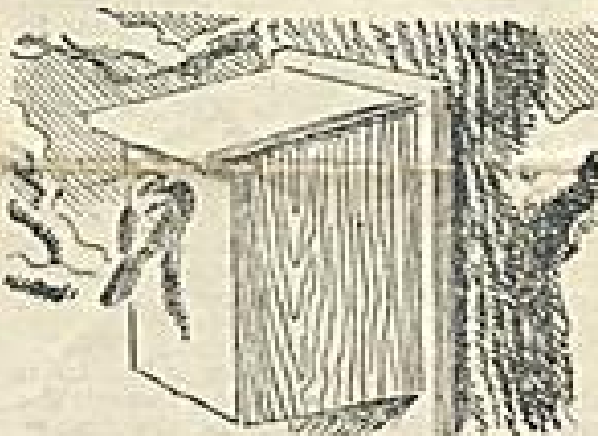
In winter, when so many of our useful insect-eating birds are away overseas, we can do much to help our feathered friends that are still with us. Prominent among them are the robin, the wren, the hedge-sparrow, the song-thrush, and the various species of tits.

There are two ways in which we can help them; we can provide food tables—a very pleasant help in time of trouble: we can provide nest-boxes—as part of a “long-term” policy.

To deal first with food, let us be clear that in open weather, even in winter, all these birds can take care of themselves without our help; but given a prolonged spell of frost and snow like we had last February, with the ground iron-hard for days on end and natural food almost unobtainable, then a little timely aid from us may make all the difference between life and death for the birds.

Now we all know that human food must not be wasted: in fact it's illegal. But there are some things we may still offer the birds without breaking the law. Here are a few suggestions for their food table:—bacon rind, either hung up in strips for the tits or minced for all comers, crumbs swept from the breakfast table, fish skin and bones, cheese rind, and bits of fat from the dog's meat man. And don't forget that in really hard weather unfrozen drinking water is as important to the birds as food.

Now as to nest-boxes. If you do it now, there is still time to make and put up a nest-box in your garden. With luck, a pair of great or blue tits may rear a brood in it, to their great advantage and yours. Members of the tit family do not begin to nest until the end of March or the beginning of April, but the longer you



give them to get used to the box the better. Tits have a habit of looking over possible nesting sites very early in the year. There are, of course, other kinds of birds that will take over nest-boxes properly made and placed.

Size, shape and position of a nest-box are all very important. How to make it would take up too much space in this Guide, but, if you are really interested, write to the Ministry at Berri Court Hotel, St. Annes, Lytham St. Annes, Lancs., for Advisory Leaflet No. 212.

